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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted at the Buca Faculty of Education, Dokuz Eylul University (Turkey), sought to identify factors associated with academic failure of college students. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire titled "Perceived Causes of Academic Failure Inventory" that identified 10 subgroups of factors: teachers' behavior; teaching methods; lack of commitment to study; problems with learning environment; problems with subject content and examinations; psychological problems of student; unsatisfactory relationship with family; future concerns related to chosen field of study; and problems of time management. Data were used to develop a predictive model that would allow researchers and teachers to explore students' perception of factors that affected learning or nonlearning. A total of 1196 volunteer students, in 3 random samples, participated in the study. Findings indicated that "failure" and "success" student groups differed significantly in their perceptions of causes of academic failure. The failure group perceived the following factors as most significant: teacher behavior, teaching methods, subject content and examinations, lack of commitment to study, and psychological problems. Students from different academic departments also tended to differ in how they rated factors. Six tables summarize the statistical data. A list of the 83 factors and factor loadings used in the study is provided in the appendix. (CH)

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PERCEIVED CAUSES OF ACADEMIC FAILURE AMONG THE STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION AT BUCA

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to make a contribution to the educational objectives to be taken by considering the students' perceptions. The purpose of this section is to identify factors that have been associated with academic failure from the available research literature. The intention is to use these factors to develop an effective and efficient model of prediction of causes of failure. Academic failure in school is a problem that has become a serious concern for countries in different parts of the world. Several research projects in this field have tried to locate the different causes of academic failure. Students usually experience academic difficulties that have both academic and non academic characteristics, and the various combinations of reasons for academic failure results in different types of student profiles suggesting different strategies of intervention. It was discovered within the research literature that when intervention techniques are used with failing students, their performance improves the subsequent school year.

Some countries have located some of the factors that are perceived to be important for academic failure and have begun to take action (Mirosley, 1984). The review of the literature points out that failing students can be assisted to become successful in classroom when appropriate intervention techniques are used.

Often in research on student learning and behavioral outcomes some personal characteristics of the students are measured and these are then related to some outcome measure. Among these personal characteristics are self-concept, personality, motivation, intelligence, cognitive style and locus of control (Zarb, 1984). However, many of the environmental and contextual problems which lead to unsuccessful learning are not taken into consideration. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors related to the failure of college students.

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In this study, student perceptions of salient factors that cause academic failure were explored. Data obtained from this study were used to derive a perception instrument that could enable teachers and researchers to explore the factors that are perceived by students to affect their learning or their non-learning. Many reviewed students revealed that the use of instruments containing items seeking individual student perceptions of a classroom environment have become common practice.

An underlying assumption of the present study, is the concept related to the fact that perceived causes of success and failure have important implications, and these results have been widely applied in educational settings.

METHOD

The objectives of this descriptive study were twofold. First, the dimensionality of perceived causes of academic failure were examined. The second objective was to examine the correlates of perception of causes as related to some biographic and demographic variables.

SAMPLES USED IN THE STUDY

Three separate random samples were used in different parts of the study and these constituted (1) 362 students (195 males and 167 females); (2) 274 students (188 females and 86 males) and (3) 560 students (262 males and 298 females). So a total of 1196 students participated for this study. Subjects volunteered to participate in the study.

The researchers went in the classrooms and asked students to participate for the study. Of approximately, 540 students, 362 agreed to participate with Phase I of the research plan. In addition, colleagues of the researchers identified 274 students who became part of Phase II of the study. And finally, 560 students were identified through the rest of the faculty. In total, 1196 students participated in the three phases of the study. Data were collected through the administration of the instrument titled *Perceived Causes of Academic Failure Inventory* (PCAFI).

PHASE I

Phase I of the study was designed to develop an instrument that would standardize factors related to student perceptions of failure. The research plan entailed in the inductive tradition that allowed naturally occurring clusters of responses to emerge from the data. The responses of the students were categorized into problem areas. The problem areas were verified through item-analysis.

Questionnaire

A random sample of 362 students were asked to specify the most important reasons behind their failure in a particular subject course or courses. Altogether 502 statements were provided by 362 students who participated in Phase I of the study. The statements were tallied and in the selection process a statement which was mentioned by less than 25 percent of the students was omitted. This left 101 statements. The items were constructed to cover topic areas in reasons of failure that resulted in 14 problem areas.

TABLE I

Eigenvalue of factors of PCAFI

Factor #	Eigenvalue	Pct of Variance	Cum Pct
I	11.55562	11.6	11.6
II	5.55930	5.6	17.2
III	4.55381	4.6	21.8
IV	3.33394	3.3	25.1
V	2.65085	2.7	27.8
VI	2.47868	2.5	30.3
VII	2.20026	2.2	32.5
VIII	2.00258	2.0	34.5
IX	1.79464	1.8	36.3

PHASE II

In Phase II of the study, 274 undergraduate students' responses to the 101 items were subjected to an item analysis. Non contributing items (item-total correlations less than .30) were removed, resulting 83 item PCAFI used in this study (Appendix A).

To examine the dimensionality of the scale, 274 subjects completed the 83 item PCAFI questionnaire. Both principal-factor analysis (PFA) and principal-components analysis (PCA) were used to extract factors. Scree plots of eigen values were found to level after nine factors (Table I).

The factors were rotated using the varimax method. Nine factors were retained that accounted for 36.3 % of the common variance. The salient factor loading closely match the apriori topic areas in reasons of failure with five exceptions. The nine interpretable factors were:

Factor I (Teacher's Behavior); Factor II (Teaching Methods); Factor III (Lack of Commitment to Study); Factor IV (Problems with Learning Environment); Factor V (Problems with Content of Subject and the Examinations); Factor VI (Psychological Problems of Students); Factor VII (Unsatisfying Relations with the Family); Factor VIII (Future Concerns Related to Chosen field of Study); Factor IX (Problems with Time Management). The factors have coefficient alphas ranging from .69 to .83 (Table II).

The items in PCAFI are framed positively, and represented perceptions of causes for "failure". Each statement is rated on a three-point scale ranging from "agree" to "disagree" (3 for "agreement", 2 for "not sure" and 1 for "disagreement"). The total scores on the 83-item PCAFI could range from 83 to 249. Namely, a high score measured agreement with the perceived causes of failure to be related to the identified course or courses failed.

PHASE III

At the final phase of the study (at the end of the first semester) the instrument was administered to a total of 560 students from six different academic majors at Buca Faculty of Education. Subjects provided biographic and demographic information such as gender, age, academic major, type of residence (such as dorm, home or boarding house); type of secondary school that they were graduated from (namely, private, state or technical school); type of place they lived

for the most part of their life (such as village, town, or city); the course or courses they failed, and they were asked to make the assessment for the degree of "fitting

TABLE II

Reliability coefficients of overall PCAFI and factors

Overall PCAFI and Factors	Cronbach Alpha	Equal length Spearman Brown	Guttman Split half	U.eq Leng. Spearman Brown
Overall PCAFI	.9042			
Factor I	.8202	.8288	.8030	.8303
Factor II	.8031	.7971	.7955	.7971
Factor III	.7857	.7459	.6947	.7472
Factor IV	.7652	.7606	.7468	.7611
Factor V	.6890	.6516	.6481	.6516
Factor VI	.6946	.5261	.5247	.5282
Factor VII	.6906	.6043	.6017	.6113
Factor VIII	.6716	.6744	.6367	.6812
Factor IX	.6985	.4459	.4457	.4524

N=560

Factor I = Teachers Behavior (10 items)

Factor II = Teaching Methods (9 items)

Factor III = Lack of Commitment to Study (11 items)

Factor IV = Problems with Learning Environment (17 items)

Factor V = Problems with Content of Subject and the Examinations (12 items)

Factor VI = Psychological Problems of Students (9 items)

Factor VII = Unsatisfying Relations with Family (5 items)

Factor VIII = Future Concerns Related to Chosen Field of Study (5 items)

Factor IX = Problems with Time Management (5 items)

the institution ". "Failing" in this context was not limited to any grade level but was a subjective evaluation done by the student. In literature, there is support for the evidence of no significant difference between subjective and objective definitions of outcome related to success or failure (Reifenberg, 1986).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pearson Product Moment Correlations were calculated to see the correlations among the factors of PCAFI (Table III). There are significant relationships within the factors but the following relationships among the factors are non significant. No relation was found between Factor IV and Factor VII. In other words, the students' "problems with learning environment" as related to the perceived cause of failure in a particular course or courses didn't correlate significantly with their "unsatisfying relations with their family". Also there was no significant relation between students' psychological problems" and their "problems with time management". Finally, students' problems with time management and the overall score of PCAFI didn't correlate significantly ($p>.05$).

F ratio was used to find the differences of perception of students in relation to their departments (Table IV). When the students were classified in terms of their departments, no significant differences were found among them in terms of total score of the instrument. Also, "teachers' attitudes", "lack of commitment to study", "unsatisfying relations with family", and "problems with time management" were not perceived significantly different among the students from different departments ($p>.05$).

However, the factor which is labeled as "teaching methods" was significantly perceived as a cause for academic failure especially among the students from educational sciences and elementary school teaching ($p<.05$). F ratio also showed that the perception of "learning environment" as a cause of failure significantly different among the differed departments. Scheffé procedure showed that students from Elementary School Teaching, Educational Sciences Department and Social Sciences Department significantly perceived this factor to be a cause for their failure as compared to the students from Fine Arts, Foreign Languages and Physical Sciences Departments ($p<.05$).

Also, the factor that was labeled as the "content of subject-matter and the examinations" as the cause of failure was perceived more important at a significant level ($p<.05$) in Physical Sciences Department (which included Chemistry.

TABLE III

Correlations among factors of PCAFI

	Overall PCAFI	Factor I	Factor II	Factor III	Factor IV	Factor V	Factor VI	Factor VII	Factor VIII	Factor IX
Overall PCAFI	1.000	.6874**	.7584	.6360**	.6923**	.6084**	.5487**	.3413**	.4999**	.4404**
Factor I	.6874**	1.000	.6336**	.2523**	.4210**	.3132**	.3031**	.1036*	.2390**	.1425**
Factor II	.7584**	.6336**	1.000	.2915	.6058**	.3274**	.2409**	.1670**	.2916**	.2017**
Factor III	.6360**	.2523**	.2915**	1.000	.2595**	.2921**	.3086**	.2302**	.3113**	.4133**
Factor IV	.6923**	.4210**	.6058**	.2595**	1.000	.2351**	.2169**	.0902	.2980**	.1690**
Factor V	.6084**	.3132**	.3274**	.2921**	.2351**	1.000	.3902**	.1615**	.1956**	.2168**
Factor VI	.5487**	.3031**	.2409**	.3086**	.2169**	.3902**	1.000	.2813**	.1804**	.0945
Factor VII	.3413**	.1036*	.1670**	.2302**	.0902	.1615**	.2813**	1.000	.1317**	.2106**
Factor VIII	.4999**	.2390**	.2916**	.3113**	.2980**	.1956**	.1804**	.1317**	1.000	.2541**
Factor IX	.4404**	.1425**	.2017**	.4133**	.1690**	.2168**	.0945	.2106**	.2541	1.000

N = 560
1-tailed significance * .01 ** .001

TABLE IV
Means, standart deviations and F values of the overall PCAFI and the subscores of students from different departments.

Departments	Overall PCAFI		Factor I		Factor II		Factor III		Factor IV		Factor V		Factor VI		Factor VII		Factor VIII		Factor IX	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Foreign Languages	162.53	23.55	16.71	5.11	20.64	5.18	21.55	5.45	41.47	5.79	22.30	5.14	14.54	3.38	5.84	1.45	10.86	2.79	8.58	2.52
Educational Sciences	170.42	21.88	17.86	4.63	23.15	4.51	22.07	5.15	43.73	5.65	20.97	4.54	14.97	3.51	6.45	2.16	12.13	2.63	9.02	3.00
Physical Sciences	167.82	21.87	17.24	4.60	21.88	4.83	22.03	5.20	41.75	5.92	23.81	4.61	15.88	3.73	6.22	1.84	10.69	2.79	8.29	2.19
Social Sciences	169.16	22.57	17.42	4.83	22.50	4.94	22.34	5.20	42.67	5.27	21.89	4.63	17.35	3.72	6.58	1.88	10.5	2.76	7.87	2.10
Fine Arts	161.92	23.33	17.72	4.47	22.00	4.36	21.37	4.80	39.21	7.21	21.90	4.75	14.02	3.58	5.15	2.01	10.23	2.41	8.68	2.80
Elementary School Teaching	172.62	19.77	17.94	4.43	23.84	3.97	22.32	5.54	45.62	3.27	21.98	5.02	15.94	2.94	6.12	1.85	10.18	2.56	8.68	2.59
F ratio	2.63		868		4.49*		.388		8.80*		5.50*		7.28*		1.72		7.58*		2.44	
P	023		502		0001		857		0001		0001		0001		127		0001		033	

* p<.05 N=560

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Physics, Biology and Mathematics Teaching) when compared to other departments at Buca Faculty of Education.

F ratio showed that the perception of "psychological problems" as a cause of failure significantly differed among the students from different departments. Scheffé procedure showed that the students from Department of Social Sciences (which included History Teaching, Geography Teaching and Turkish Literature) had the highest mean scores for "psychological problems" as compared to students from the Department of Foreign Languages (English, German and French Teaching), Fine Arts and Educational Sciences (which included Curriculum Development and Instruction, Counseling and Guidance and Educational Administration and Planning) ($p<.05$).

Finally, when the students are compared in terms of their perceptions of causes of academic failure according to the departments they belong, students from Educational Sciences had the highest mean score on the factor labeled as "Future Concerns Related to the Chosen Field of Study", when compared to each and other department at Buca Faculty of Education ($p<.05$).

It is believed that to be able to interpret the results shown in Table IV, more detailed information is needed by the use of other related instruments. However, the reason why the students attribute their causes of failure to the factor labeled as "Future Concerns Related to the Chosen Field of Study" can be explained as follows. First, the ratio of the student body in the Department of Educational Sciences to the available positions is unproportional. Second, there is vagueness of definitions of career roles.

T-test were performed to see the differences of means of the total score of the inventory and the total scores of the subscales of the inventory between the "failure" and "success" groups (Table V). In the findings "failure" and "success" groups differ significantly in their perceptions of causes of academic failure in the total score of PCAFI and in five subscales of the instrument. Namely, "failure" group perceived "teacher behavior", "teaching methods", "lack of commitment to study", "problems with content of subject matter and the examinations" and "psychological problems" to be causes of their failure more than the "success" group. The research findings in literature suggests that instructor expressiveness has a cognitive and motivational impact on students (Perry and Penner, 1990). At this point, the instrument used in this study seem to discriminate effectively between "failure" and "success" groups, suggesting the need for the establishment of predictive validity of PCAFI in future research.

TABLE V

Means, standard deviations, t values of PCAFI scores in terms of being a success and failure groups

	Success Group N=219		Failure Group N=341		t value	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Overall PCAFI	162.40	24.63	171.08	20.115	4.56**	.000
Teacher Behavior	16.65	4.80	17.94	4.57	-3.20*	.001
Teaching Methods	21.54	22.73	5.219	4.450	-2.87*	.004
Lack of Commitment to Study	21.36	22.37	5.43	5.05	-2.25*	.025
Learning Environment	42.01	42.71	6.038	5.79	-1.37	.172
Problems with content of subject & the examinations	20.58	4.65	23.34	4.64	-6.85**	.000
Psychological problems of students	14.97	3.85	15.90	3.46	-2.96*	.003
Unsatisfying relations with family	6.296	1.967	6.23	1.864	.39	.693
Future concerns related to chosen field of study	10.69	2.77	11.13	2.77	-1.84	.067
Problems with time management	8.26	2.56	8.703	2.562	-1.96	.051

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

Also, it should be noted that, attribution theorists argue that the perceived causes of success and failure have important implications and they postulate that the most important perceived causes of academic success and failure are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck (Weiner, 1980). At this point, the perceptions of these

students regarding the causes of academic failure can be studied from an attributional point of view.

Also, t-tests were performed to see the differences of means of the total score of the inventory and the total scores of the subscales of PCAFI between the two genders (Table VI).

TABLE VI

Means, standard deviations, t values of PCAFI total and subscale scores of PCAFI related to gender

PCAFI total and subscales	Females N=298 M	SD	Males N=262 M	SD	t value	P
PCAFI Total	165.22	21.44	170.05	23.11	-2.80	.005*
Teacher Behavior	17.46	4.58	17.41	4.83	.13	.899
Teaching Methods	21.96	4.52	22.6	5.07	-1.6	.111
Lack of Commitment to Study	21.29	5.24	22.75	5.08	-3.35	.001**
Learning Environment	42.39	5.80	42.49	5.99	-.19	.852
Problems with content of subject & the examinations	21.94	4.63	22.62	5.03	-1.66	.097
Psychological problems of students	15.35	3.66	15.74	3.61	-1.28	.20
Unsatisfying relations with family	6.01	1.68	6.53	2.09	-3.21	.001**
Future concerns related to chosen field of study	10.76	2.64	11.19	2.90	-1.83	.068
Problems with time management	8.01	2.39	9.12	2.63	-5.20	.000**

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

In the findings, it can be stated that males scored higher on three factors more than females did. Also, males had higher mean scores on the total score of PCAFI. Namely, males reported more "lack of commitment to study", more "unsatisfying relations with family" and more "problems with time management" than females did. In the literature, there is evidence that poor time -management behavior is a source of poor academic performance (Gall, 1988; Longman and Atkinson, 1988). Also, it is reported that women are better time managers than men (Macan, Shahani, 1990). At this point, it can be stated that, male students are the ones who hold part-time or full-time jobs as well as attend school, and this creates a problem of time-management at school.

In this study it is also found that as the age of student goes higher there are more issues around time management suggesting the growing need to make living on their own as the years go by.

Institutional-fit was another variable to be tested in this study. The results showed that as the students felt more institutional fit the less were the reported problems regarding causes of failure. In the research literature it is stated that an improved student-institutional fit would enhance performance and improve motivation (Lang, et. al., 1988), at this point, the findings in this study are supported in research literature.

Results found in this study demonstrate the importance of early intervention with students experiencing school difficulties. Future research on the individual characteristics of students could be helpful in recognizing at risk students early and providing effective intervention programs.

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APPENDIX (A)

Item #	FACTORS	Factor Loadings
	Factor I (Teacher Behaviors)	
74	Teacher's attitude is usually negative	. 74781
46	They're not trustworthy	. 64392
10	Teachers are not democratic	. 63886
11	There is no consistency between what they say and what they do	. 63173
73	Teachers are very authoritarian	. 57723
72	Teachers disregard me	. 54840
14	The teachers don't treat people equally	. 54429
24	The teachers are not understanding	. 52999
78	Teachers don't provide me with the material I need	. 38090
34	The exams questions are related to the details but they don't capture the essence of the material	. 31035
	Factor II (Teaching Methods)	
36	Teachers don't lecture well	. 55070
75	The teachers come to the classroom unprepared	. 48139
52	Teachers lecture unwillingly	. 47491
93	Teachers don't relate the different topics of the course to each other	.41230
25	Teachers can't give examples for his/her lecture	. 40073
53	The voice of teachers is very monotonous	. 38240
2	Teachers don't relate the subject matter to other disciplines	. 35976
9	Teachers can't simplify the lecture	. 33773
56	The teachers don't take my level of understanding into consideration	. 32065

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	Factor III (Lack of Commitment to Study)	
87	I'm not interested in the subject	. 73854
83	I concentrate on other things during the lectures	. 63544
29	I can't concentrate in the classroom	. 61519
47	I don't like listening to the lectures	. 61335
19	I don't like to study	. 59593
5	I don't study systematically	. 54635
22	I don't come prepared for my classes	. 45633
44	I don't like this school	. 36852
90	I can't make the best use of my time while studying	. 36572
30	I prefer to have fun	. 33503
71	I am not able to absorb the information	. 31483
	Factor IV(Problems with Learning Environment)	
77	Education is not practicum-oriented	. 55114
38	There's not enough reference material for the practicum courses	. 54223
66	I find it difficult to find material for my studies	.49182
95	Audio-visual material is not widely used	. 47356
21	Due to the high cost of books I don't read enough	. 43377
92	The questions in the examinations are not based on interpretation of the subjects	. 44575
39	The subject matters are not framed a satisfactory way	. 42483
98	There aren't enough courses related to my major	. 40594
55	There is no orientation towards research	. 39238
100	The subject matter is not related to real life experiences	. 38583
97	I can't use my creativeness in the classroom	. 38360
80	There are too many things to memorize	. 37372
17	There are not enough reference books in the library	. 36706
40	The same subjects are being lectured over and over again	. 36164

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37	The assessment criteria for the success of the student is mainly based on examinations	.32711
101	There is not enough discussion done by the students after the lectures	. 31830
62	The counseling services don't work	. 30369

Factor V (Problems with Content of Subject and the Examinations)

58	The course is very difficult for me	. 60439
26	The intellectual level of the lectures exceeds my capacity of understanding	. 55492
3	I need a lot of time to study for this subject	. 52618
8	Usually the questions that are asked on the examinations are the ones that we haven't covered	.45935
45	I can't understand the lecture	.44282
63	I don't remember the things I studied during the examinations	. 42049
20	The length of time to prepare for the examinations is very short	. 40483
35	The length of time for the examinations is not enough	. 33264
88	Examinations are very stressful	. 33258
89	I can not compete with my friends who come from various institutions	. 31784
31	I don't know how to study systematically	. 31575
91	The questions on the exams are not clear enough	. 30238

Factor VII (Psychological Problems of Students)

48	I can't solve my personal problems	.56500
65	The relations with my friends are not satisfactory	.54593
64	I'm never sure of myself when it comes to being successful	. 43300
23	I'm not encouraged to participate in class	. 41631
84	I don't have any close friends	. 41631
6	I feel I'm far away from my family	. 37834

18	I haven't been able to adapt to the big city	. 36228
15	I can't communicate with the teacher	. 34006
33	I'm afraid of being unsuccessful	. 30078
	Factor VII (Unsatisfying Relations with Family)	
61	I don't have a caring family	. 67546
12	My family is not supportive of me	. 65862
42	I don't have satisfying relations with my family	. 60796
81	I don't feel comfortable when I'm with my family	. 48699
28	My family is uneducated	. 42166
	Factor VIII (Future Concerns Related to Chosen Field of Study)	
79	I won't be able to obtain an honorable status in the society after my graduation	. 64685
32	I'm worried about my future	. 59854
59	There's no guarantee for me to find a job after graduation	. 57570
27	I won't be able to obtain a high economic status after graduation	. 55176
69	I can't make definite career plans for the future	. 46988
	Factor IX (Problems with Time Management)	
70	I don't have enough time to get prepared for the examinations	. 56641
86	I have to work off-campus to make money	. 44167
68	There is no time for fun	. 43143
49	I have problems in commuting (transportation problems)	. 37680
67	I am not able to work on my lessons except during class	. 30315